



*San Diego's Voice On Mental Illness*

**Did you know?**

- 8,000,000 or more people in the United States have an eating disorder
- 90% are women
- Victims may be rich or poor
- Eating disorders usually start in the teens, but may begin as early as age 8

**If it isn't treated, anorexia can cause the following health problems:**

- Stomach problems
- Heart problems
- Irregular periods or no periods
- Fine hair all over the body, including the face
- Dry, scaly skin
- Kidney problems
- Dental problems (from throwing up stomach acid)
- Dehydration (not enough water in the body)

## **Eating Disorders: Facts for Teens**

### **What is an eating disorder?**

An eating disorder is an obsession with food and weight that harms a person's well-being. Although we all worry about our weight sometimes, people with an eating disorder go to extremes to keep from gaining weight. There are two main eating disorders: anorexia and bulimia.

**What causes eating disorders?**

We don't know exactly. Possible cause include feeling stressed out or upset about something in your life, or feeling like you need to be "in control". Society also puts a lot of

pressure on people to be thin. This pressure can contribute too.

### **What is anorexia?**

People with anorexia are obsessed with being thin. They don't want to eat, and they are afraid of gaining weight. They may constantly worry about how many calories they take in or how much fat is in their food. They may take diet pills, laxatives or water pills to lose weight. They may exercise too much. Anorexics usually think they're fat even though they're very thin. People with anorexia may get so thin that they look like they're sick.

### **What is bulimia?**

Bulimia is eating a lot of food at once (called bingeing), and the throwing up or using laxatives to remove the food from the body (called purging). After a binge, some bulimics fast (don't eat) or over exercise to keep from gaining weight. People with bulimia may also use water pills, laxatives or diet pills to "control" their weight. People with bulimia often try to hide their bingeing and purging. They may hide food for binges. Bulimics are usually close to normal weight, but their weight may go up and down

## **What's wrong with trying to be thin?**

It's healthy to watch what you eat and to exercise. What isn't healthy is worrying all the time about your weight and what you eat. People with eating disorders do harmful things to their bodies because of their obsession about their weight.

*Open Your Mind*



*Mental Illnesses  
Are Brain Disorders  
1-800-950-NAMI*

## Can eating disorders be treated?

Yes. For anorexia, the first step is getting back to a normal weight. If you're malnourished or very thin, you may be put in the hospital. Your doctor will probably want you to see a dietitian to learn how to pick healthy foods and eat at regular times. For both anorexics and bulimics, family and individual counseling (talking about your feelings about your weight and problems in your life) is helpful.

## What are the warning signs?

The following are possible warning signs of anorexia and bulimia:

- **Unnatural concern about body weight (even if the person is not overweight)**
- **Obsession with calories, fat grams and food**
- **Use of any medicines to keep from gaining weight (diet pills, laxatives, water pills)**

More serious warning signs may be harder to notice because people who have an eating disorder try to keep it secret. Watch for these signs:

- **Throwing up after meals**
- **Refusing to eat or lying about how much was eaten**
- **Fainting**
- **Over-exercising**
- **Not having periods**
- **Increased anxiety about weight**
- **Calluses or scars on the knuckle (from forced throwing up)**
- **Denying that there is anything wrong**

## Where can I get more information?

Anorexia Nervosa and Related Eating Disorders, Inc.  
<http://www.anred.com>

National Assoc. of Anorexia and Associated Disorders  
 P.O. Box 7  
 Highland Park, IL.60035  
 847-831-3438  
<http://www.anad.org>

National Eating Disorders Association  
 603 Stewart Street, Suite 803  
 Seattle, WA 98101-1264  
 Ph. (206) 382-3587  
 Fax (206) 829-8501  
 Toll-Free Information & Referral HelpLine 1-800-931-2237  
[www.NationalEatingDisorders.org](http://www.NationalEatingDisorders.org)  
[info@nationaleatingdisorders.org](mailto:info@nationaleatingdisorders.org)

## NAMI San Diego

NAMI San Diego, a non-profit organization, provides education, support services, and advocacy to improve the quality of life of everyone affected by mental illnesses. It is an affiliate of the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) and NAMI California. Its membership includes persons with brain disorders, their families, friends, mental health professionals and supportive members of the

community.

NAMI offers monthly informational meetings, a monthly newsletter, free educational programs, a lending library of books and video-tapes, and support meetings for consumers and families throughout the county.

For information and support call

**NAMI San Diego  
 Helpline**

**(800) 523-5933**

**(619) 543-1434**

**[www.namisaniego.org](http://www.namisaniego.org)  
[information@namisd.org](mailto:information@namisd.org)**